

U.S., Soviet discuss use of spy planes to monitor SALT compliance

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Moscow—The United States has begun exploring with the Soviet Union the sensitive matter of flights by U-2 spy planes along the Soviet border that would be aimed at monitoring Soviet compliance with the new strategic arms limitation treaty.

Senior Western diplomats said yesterday that Kremlin acquiescence to Ameri-

can intelligence flights over Turkish territory has been discussed with Soviet officials.

Officially, the Russians have yet to reply, but senior Western diplomats said they were not optimistic the Soviet Union would, at least publicly, give its approval to the U-2 flights along its border.

"I find it difficult to believe the Soviet Union would publicly acquiesce in anything involving espionage against the Sovi-

et Union," a Western diplomat said.

Flights by high-flying American aircraft over Turkey have been suggested by American intelligence officials as a means of verifying Soviet compliance with the new strategic arms limitation treaty to be signed next month in Vienna by President Carter and Soviet President Leonid I. Brezhnev.

Doubts about whether American intelligence can adequately verify the treaty could be crucial to the treaty's chances of Senate passage.

The Turkish premier, Bulent Ecevit, has told the U.S. he will only allow U-2 flights over Turkish territory if the Soviets do not object.

Western sources said yesterday that outright Soviet refusal to agree to the spy flights along its border with Turkey would deal a serious blow to the SALT treaty's ratification chances.

"It would be very unwise on their part if they really want a SALT agreement," a senior Western official said.

On the other hand, the idea of U-2 spy flights, even over the territory of a neighboring country, has been especially sensitive to the Soviet Union ever since 1960, when Francis Gary Powers was shot down over Russia while on an American intelligence mission.

Thus, U.S. officials seem to suggest that the best they can hope for is a non-committal response from the Kremlin.

The U-2 flights are needed, in part, to help replace American listening posts along the Soviet border in Iran that were dismantled after the Iranian revolution.

Although the planes would not fly directly over the Soviet Union, they are equipped with sophisticated electronic gear that will enable them to "look" over the Soviet border.